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The Cotter's
Saturday Night
and Other Poems
by Robert Burns



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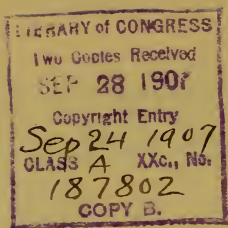
Robert Burns-

THE COTTER'S SATURDAY
NIGHT AND OTHER POEMS
BY ROBERT BURNS ❧ ❧ ❧

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
WALTER TAYLOR FIELD



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There was nothing in the circumstances of his life to make a poet; indeed there was everything to discourage the making of one. Born in an artificial age and amid the most prosaic surroundings; oppressed by a poverty so insistent that

he was forced to labor far beyond his strength; thinking out his poems as he stumbled along the furrow behind his plow, or rode through the night pursuing the duties of a petty exciseman; drawn to the tavern as a relief from overwork and worry, and there indulging himself until, at the age of thirty-seven, he died, worn out with his excesses,—this is the sad history of one of the brightest and sweetest characters that Scotland has produced.

Yet his life was not all dark. His early years, though shrouded in poverty, were brightened by the influence of a home where love and sympathy were ever present and where devoted piety glorified the mean surroundings. It is into this home that he lets us look in "The Cotter's Saturday Night". The cotter is Burns's father,—an honest, intelligent, God-fearing man who with his "frugal wife" and the "youngsters a'" make such a group as would adorn any land and any age. It illustrates the homely virtue, the simple dignity, and the religious faith which have long characterized the Scottish peasantry. The most valuable

testimony as to the truth of "The Cotter's Saturday Night" is that given by the old servant of Burns's friend Mrs. Dunlop, who said, "Gentlemen and ladies may think muckle o' this. But for me, it's naething but what I saw i' my faither's hoose every day, and I dinna see hoo he could hae tell't it ony ither way."

"The Cotter's Saturday Night" shows us the religious element in Burns—for in spite of his lapses from virtue and his hatred of a harsh theology, he was essentially religious. His religion, however, was the religion of sentiment and impulse—not of principle. His heart was right but his will was pitifully weak. The controlling motive of his life was love—a love often unwisely bestowed, often leading him into temptations from which he was not strong enough to free himself, but always full and rich and magnificently whole-souled.

It is in his songs that he shows his real strength,—for here his passion, his tenderness, and his exquisite sense of melody are most strongly felt. They sing themselves. As Carlyle says, "they

come in fitful gushes, in glowing hints, in fantastic breaks, in warblings not of the voice only but of the whole mind."

We must not expect to find in Burns those qualities which from his very nature were impossible. His poetry is not the greatest poetry, and the music of his verse is different in kind from that of every other British poet. It is not the many-toned symphony of Shakespeare, nor the organ fugue of Milton, nor the rich fantasie of Spenser, nor even the soaring lark-song of Shelley. It is the music of a shepherd's pipe, but it carries straight to the heart.

WALTER TAYLOR FIELD

THE COTTER'S SATURDAY NIGHT

INSCRIBED TO ROBERT AIKEN, ESQ.

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys and destiny obscure;
Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the poor.

—GRAY

MY LOV'D, my honour'd, much respected
friend!

No mercenary bard his homage pays;
With honest pride, I scorn each selfish end;
My dearest meed a friend's esteem and praise.
To you I sing, in simple Scottish lays,
The lowly train in life's sequester'd scene;
The native feelings strong, the guileless ways;
What Aiken in a cottage would have been;
Ah! tho' his worth unknown, far happier there, I ween!

November chill blaws loud wi' angry sugh,
The short'ning winter day is near a close;
The miry beasts retreating frae the pleugh,
The black'ning trains o' craws to their repose;
The toil-worn Cotter frae his labour goes,—
This night his weekly toil is at an end,—
Collects his spades, his mattocks, and his hoes,
Hoping the morn in ease and rest to spend,
And weary, o'er the moor, his course does hameward
bend.

At length his lonely cot appears in view,
Beneath the shelter of an aged tree;
Th' expectant wee-things, toddlin, stacher through
To meet their dad, wi' flichterin noise an' glee.
His wee bit ingle, blinkin bonilie,
His clean hearth-stane, his thrifty wifie's smile,
The lisping infant prattling on his knee,
Does a' his weary kiaugh and care beguile,
An' makes him quite forget his labour an' his toil.

Belyve, the elder bairns come drappin in,
At service out amang the farmers roun';
Some ca' the pleugh, some herd, some tentie rin
A cannie errand to a neibor toun:
Their eldest hope, their Jenny, woman-grown,
In youthfu' bloom, love sparkling in her ee,
Comes hame, perhaps to shew a braw new
gown,
Or deposite her sair-won penny-fee
To help her parents dear, if they in hardship be.

With joy unfeign'd brothers and sisters meet,
An' each for other's weelfare kindly spiers:
The social hours, swift-wing'd, unnotic'd fleet;
Each tells the uncoss that he sees or hears.
The parents, partial, eye their hopeful years;
Anticipation forward points the view;
The mother, wi' her needle an' her sheers,
Gars auld claes look amaist as weel's the new;
The father mixes a' wi' admonition due.

Their master's an' their mistress's command
The younkers a' are warned to obey;
An' mind their labours wi' an eydent hand,
An' ne'er, tho' out o' sight, to jauk or play:
"An' O! be sure to fear the Lord alway,
An' mind your duty, duly, morn an' night!
Lest in temptation's path ye gang astray,
Implore His counsel and assisting might:
They never sought in vain that sought the Lord
aright!"

But hark! A rap comes gently to the door.
Jenny, wha kens the meaning o' the same,
Tells how a neibor lad cam o'er the moor,
To do some errands, and convoy her hame.
The wily mother sees the conscious flame
Sparkle in Jenny's ee, and flush her cheek;
Wi' heart-struck, anxious care, inquires his name,
While Jenny hafflins is afraid to speak;
Weel pleas'd the mother hears it's nae wild worthless
rake.

Wi' kindly welcome Jenny brings him ben,
A strappin youth; he takes the mother's eye;
Blythe Jenny sees the visit's no ill taen;
The father cracks of horses, pleughs, and kye.
The youngster's artless heart o'erflows wi' joy,
But, blate and laithfu', scarce can weel behave;
The mother wi' a woman's wiles can spy
What maks the youth sae bashfu' an' sae grave,
Weel pleas'd to think her bairn's respected like the
lave.

O happy love! where love like this is found!
O heart-felt raptures! bliss beyond compare!
I've pacèd much this weary, mortal round,
And sage experience bids me this declare—
"If Heaven a draught of heavenly pleasure spare,
One cordial in this melancholy vale,
'Tis when a youthful, loving, modest pair,
In other's arms breathe out the tender tale,
Beneath the milk-white thorn that scents the ev'ning
gale."

Is there, in human form, that bears a heart,
A wretch! a villain! lost to love and truth!
That can with studied, sly, ensnaring art
Betray sweet Jenny's unsuspecting youth?
Curse on his perjur'd arts! dissembling smooth!
Are honour, virtue, conscience, all exil'd?
Is there no pity, no relenting ruth,
Points to the parents fondling o'er their child,
Then paints the ruin'd maid, and their distraction
wild?

But now the supper crowns their simple board,
The halesome parritch, chief of Scotia's food;
The sowpe their only hawkie does afford,
That yont the hallan snugly chows her cud.
The dame brings forth, in complimentary mood,
To grace the lad, her weel-hain'd kebbuck fell,
An' aft he's prest, an' aft he ca's it guid;
The frugal wifie, garrulous, will tell
How 't was a towmond auld, sin' lint was i' the bell.

The cheerfu' supper done, wi' serious face,
They round the ingle form a circle wide;
The sire turns o'er with patriarchal grace
The big ha'-bible, ance his father's pride;
His bonnet rev'rently is laid aside,
His lyart haffets wearing thin and bare;
Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide,
He wales a portion with judicious care;
And, "Let us worship God," he says with solemn
air.

They chant their artless notes in simple guise;
They tune their hearts, by far the noblest aim:
Perhaps DUNDEE'S wild-warbling measures rise,
Or plaintive MARTYRS, worthy of the name,
Or noble ELGIN beets the heaven-ward flame,
The sweetest far of Scotia's holy lays.
Compar'd with these, Italian trills are tame;
The tickl'd ear no heart-felt raptures raise:
Nae unison hae they with our Creator's praise.

The priest-like father reads the sacred page,—
How Abram was the friend of GOD on high;
Or Moses bade eternal warfare wage
With Amalek's ungracious progeny;
Or how the royal bard did groaning lie
Beneath the stroke of heaven's avenging ire;
Or Job's pathetic plaint, and wailing cry;
Or rapt Isaiah's wild, seraphic fire;
Or other holy seers that tune the sacred lyre.

Perhaps the Christian volume is the theme,—
How guiltless blood for guilty man was shed;
How HE, who bore in heav'n the second name,
Had not on earth whereon to lay His head:
How His first followers and servants sped;
The precepts sage they wrote to many a land:
How he, who lone in Patmos banishèd,
Saw in the sun a mighty angel stand,
And heard great Bab'lon's doom pronounced by
Heav'n's command.

Then kneeling down to HEAVEN'S ETERNAL KING,
The saint, the father, and the husband prays:
Hope "springs exulting on triumphant wing,"
That thus they all shall meet in future days:
There ever bask in uncreated rays,
No more to sigh or shed the bitter tear,
Together hymning their Creator's praise,
In such society, yet still more dear,
While circling Time moves round in an eternal
sphere.

Compar'd with this, how poor Religion's pride
In all the pomp of method and of art,
When men display to congregations wide
Devotion's ev'ry grace except the heart!
The Pow'r, incens'd, the pageant will desert,
The pompous strain, the sacerdotal stole;
But haply in some cottage far apart
May hear, well pleased, the language of the soul,
And in His book of life the inmates poor enrol.

Then homeward all take off their sev'ral way;
The youngling cottagers retire to rest;
The parent-pair their secret homage pay,
And proffer up to Heav'n the warm request
That He who stills the raven's clam'rous nest
And decks the lily fair in flow'ry pride,
Would, in the way His wisdom sees the best,
For them and for their little ones provide;
But chiefly, in their hearts with grace divine preside

From scenes like these old Scotia's grandeur
springs,
That makes her lov'd at home, rever'd abroad:
Princes and lords are but the breath of kings,
"An honest man 's the noblest work of God":
And certes, in fair Virtue's heavenly road,
The cottage leaves the palace far behind:
What is a lordling's pomp? a cumbrous load,
Disguising oft the wretch of human kind,
Studied in arts of hell, in wickedness refin'd!

O Scotia! my dear, my native soil!

For whom my warmest wish to Heaven is sent!

Long may thy hardy sons of rustic toil

Be blest with health, and peace, and sweet
content!

And, oh! may Heaven their simple lives prevent
From luxury's contagion, weak and vile!

Then, howe'er crowns and coronets be rent,

A virtuous populace may rise the while,

And stand a wall of fire around their much-lov'd isle.

O Thou! who pour'd the patriotic tide

That stream'd thro' Wallace's undaunted heart,

Who dar'd to nobly stem tyrannic pride,

Or nobly die, the second glorious part,—

(The patriot's God peculiarly thou art,

His friend, inspirer, guardian, and reward!)

O never, never Scotia's realm desert,

But still the patriot, and the patriot-bard,

In bright succession raise, her ornament and guard!

TO A MOUSE

ON TURNING UP HER NEST WITH THE PLOUGH,

NOVEMBER, 1785

WEE, sleekit, cowrin, tim'rous beastie,
Oh, what a panic's in thy breastie!
Thou need na start awa sae hasty,
Wi' bickerin brattle!

I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee
Wi' murd'rin pattle!

I'm truly sorry man's dominion
Has broken nature's social union,
An' justifies that ill opinion
Which makes thee startle
At me, thy poor earth-born companion,
An' fellow-mortal!

I doubt na, whyles, but thou may thieve:
What then? poor beastie, thou maun live!
A daimen icker in a thrave
 'S a sma' request;
I'll get a blessin wi' the lave,
 An' never miss 't!

Thy wee bit housie, too, in ruin!
Its silly wa's the win's are strewin!
An' naething, now, to big a new ane,
 O' foggage green!
An' bleak December's winds ensuin
 Baith snell an' keen!

Thou saw the fields laid bare and waste,
An' weary winter comin fast,
An' cozie here beneath the blast
 Thou thought to dwell,
Till crash! the cruel coulter past
 Out thro' thy cell.

That wee bit heap o' leaves an' stibble
Has cost thee mony a weary nibble!
Now thou's turn'd out for a' thy trouble,
But house or hald,
To thole the winter's sleety dribble
An' cranreuch cauld!

But, Mousie, thou art no thy lane
In proving foresight may be vain:
The best laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft a-gley,
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain
For promis'd joy.

Still thou art blest, compar'd wi' me!
The present only toucheth thee:
But, och! I backward cast my ee
On prospects drear!
An' forward, tho' I canna see,
I guess an' fear!

A MAN'S A MAN FOR A' THAT

IS there, for honest poverty,
That hings his head, an' a' that?
The coward slave, we pass him by,
We dare be poor for a' that!
For a' that, an' a' that,
Our toils obscure, an' a' that;
The rank is but the guinea's stamp;
The man's the gowd for a' that.

What tho' on hamely fare we dine,
Wear hodden-gray, and a' that;
Gie fools their silk, and knaves their wine,
A man's a man for a' that.
For a' that, an' a' that,
Their tinsel show, an' a' that;
The honest man, tho' e'er sae poor,
Is king o'men for a' that.

Ye see yon birkie, ca'd a lord,
Wha struts, an' stares, an' a' that;
Tho' hundreds worship at his word,
He's but a coot for a' that:
For a' that, an' a' that,
His riband, star, an' a' that,
The man o' independent mind,
He looks and laughs at a' that.

A prince can mak a belted knight,
A marquis, duke, an' a' that;
But an honest man's aboon his might,
Guid faith he mauna fa' that!
For a' that, an' a' that,
Their dignities, an' a' that,
The pith o' sense, an' pride o' worth,
Are higher rank than a' that.

Then let us pray that come it may,
As come it will for a' that,
That sense and worth, o'er a' the earth,
May bear the gree, an' a' that.

For a' that, an' a' that,
It's coming yet, for a' that,
That man to man, the world o'er
Shall brothers be for a' that



SCOTS WHA HAE

ROBERT BRUCE'S ADDRESS TO HIS ARMY



COTS, wha hae wi' Wallace bled,
Scots, wham Bruce has aften led;
Welcome to your gory bed,
Or to victory!

Now 's the day, and now 's the hour;
See the front o' battle lour;
See approach proud Edward's power—
Chains and slavery!

Wha will be a traitor knave?
Wha can fill a coward's grave?
Wha sae base as be a slave?
Let him turn and flee!
Wha for Scotland's king and law
Freedom's sword will strongly draw,
Freeman stand, or Freeman fa',
Let him follow me!

By oppression's woes and pains!
By your sons in servile chains!
We will drain our dearest veins,
 But they shall be free!
Lay the proud usurpers low!
Tyrants fall in every foe!
Liberty's in every blow!—
 Let us do, or die!



A RED, RED ROSE

MY Luve is like a red, red rose,
That's newly sprung in June:
My Luve is like the melodie,
That's sweetly play'd in tune

As fair thou art, my bonie lass,
So deep in luve am I:
And I will luve thee still, my Dear,
Till a' the seas gang dry.

Till a' the seas gang dry, my Dear,
And the rocks melt wi' the sun;
And I will luve thee still, my Dear,
While the sands o' life shall run.

And fare-thee-well, my only Luve!
And fare-thee-well awhile!
And I will come again, my Luve,
Tho' 't were ten thousand mile!

BONIE DOON

 E flowery banks o' bonie Doon,
How can ye blume sae fair?
How can ye chant, ye little birds,
And I sae fu' o' care?

Thou 'll break my heart, thou bonie bird,
That sings upon the bough;
Thou minds me o' the happy days,
When my fause luv was true.

Thou 'll break my heart, thou bonie bird,
That sings beside thy mate;
For sae I sat, and sae I sang,
And wist na o' my fate.

Aft hae I rov'd by bonie Doon
To see the wood-bine twine,
And ilka bird sang o' its luv.
And sae did I o' mine.

Wi' lightsome heart I pu'd a rose
Frae aff its thorny tree;
And my fause luvver staw my rose
But left the thorn wi' me.



FLOW GENTLY, SWEET AFTON

FLOW gently, sweet Afton, among thy green
braes,
Flow gently, I'll sing thee a song in thy praise ;
My Mary's asleep by thy murmuring stream,
Flow gently, sweet Afton, disturb not her dream.

Thou stock-dove whose echo resounds thro' the glen,
Ye wild whistling blackbirds in yon thorny den,
Thou green-crested lapwing, thy screaming forbear,
I charge you disturb not my slumbering fair.

How lofty, sweet Afton, thy neighbouring hills,
Far mark'd with the courses of clear winding rills ;
There daily I wander as noon rises high,
My flocks and my Mary's sweet cot in my eye.

How pleasant thy banks and green valleys below,
Where wild in the woodlands the primroses blow ;

There oft, as mild Evening weeps over the lea,
The sweet-scented birk shades my Mary and me.

Thy crystal stream, Afton, how lovely it glides,
And winds by the cot where my Mary resides;
How wanton thy waters her snowy feet lave,
As gathering sweet flow'rets she stems thy clear wave.

Flow gently, sweet Afton, among thy green braes,
Flow gently, sweet river, the theme of my lays;
My Mary's asleep by thy murmuring stream,
Flow gently, sweet Afton, disturb not her dream.



OF A' THE AIRTS



F a' the airts the wind can blaw
I dearly like the west,
For there the bonie lassie lives,
The lassie I lo'e best :

There's wild woods grow an' rivers row,
An' mony a hill between ;
But day and night my fancy's flight
Is ever wi' my Jean.

I see her in the dewy flow'rs,
I see her sweet an' fair :
I hear her in the tunefu' birds,
I hear her charm the air :
There 's not a bonie flow'r that springs
By fountain, shaw, or green ;
There 's not a bonie bird that sings,
But minds me o' my Jean.

JOHN ANDERSON, MY JO

JOHN Anderson my jo, John,
When we were first acquaint,
Your locks were like the raven,
Your bonie brow was brent;
But now your brow is beld, John,
Your locks are like the snaw;
But blessings on your frosty pow,
John Anderson my jo.

John Anderson my jo, John,
We clamb the hill thegither;
And monie a canty day, John,
We've had wi' ane anither:
Now we maun totter down, John,
And hand in hand we'll go,
And sleep thegither at the foot,
John Anderson my jo.

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